UNIT 1

Europe During Medieval Times

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Setting the Stage

Europe During Medieval Times

We will begin our study of the medieval world with the continent of Europe. Our study of this region will include England, the continent of Europe, and the Byzantine Empire (which straddled Europe and Asia).

Europe is bounded by seas and oceans and threaded with rivers. During medieval times, these waterways allowed people to travel more easily through Europe, but they also made settlements along coastal areas vulnerable to attack by invaders. Mountain ranges—like the Pyrenees, Alps, and Carpathian Mountains—helped protect settlements but also acted as barriers to travel and trade.

The period of time we call *medieval* began with the fall of the Roman Empire and lasted until about 1450 C.E. (C.E. means Common Era, and B.C.E. means Before the Common Era). Toward the end of this period, many Europeans felt they were living in a time of dramatic change. They began referring to the centuries since the fall of Rome as the Middle Ages. We still use this term today.

Historians divide the European Middle Ages into three periods:

- *Early Middle Ages*: From about 476 to 1000 C.E.
- *High Middle Ages*: From about 1000 to 1300 C.E.
- *Late Middle Ages*: From about 1300 to 1450 C.E.

Europe During Medieval Times

The Early Middle Ages began after the fall of the Roman Empire in the west. The Roman Empire had unified Europe. After the empire ended, western Europe fell into chaos. People spoke different languages and could not communicate as easily. Fewer travelers braved the ruined roads. Force became the law of the land. In the east, however, the Byzantine Empire survived Rome's fall.

By the start of the High Middle Ages, about 1000 C.E., life had become more stable. Many separate European kingdoms (such as England, France, the Papal States, and the Holy Roman Empire) had formed in the west.

During the High Middle Ages, most people in western Europe lived in the countryside under an economic and political system called *feudalism*. Under feudalism, a king (sometimes a queen) ruled the kingdom. The king granted land to nobles in exchange for military service. Peasants worked the land for the nobles.

The Late Middle Ages were a time of transition. Trade between the west and the east flourished once more, as it had under the Roman Empire. As a consequence, people in western Europe began moving from the countryside into towns. This led to many other changes.

Let's start our exploration of the Middle Ages with a close look at the Roman Empire. Why did it fall? What influence did it have on western civilization?

Climate Zones of Europe

CHAPTER 1

The oldest of ancient Rome's great roads, the Appian Way ran from Rome to southern Italy.

The Legacy of the Roman Empire

1.1 Introduction

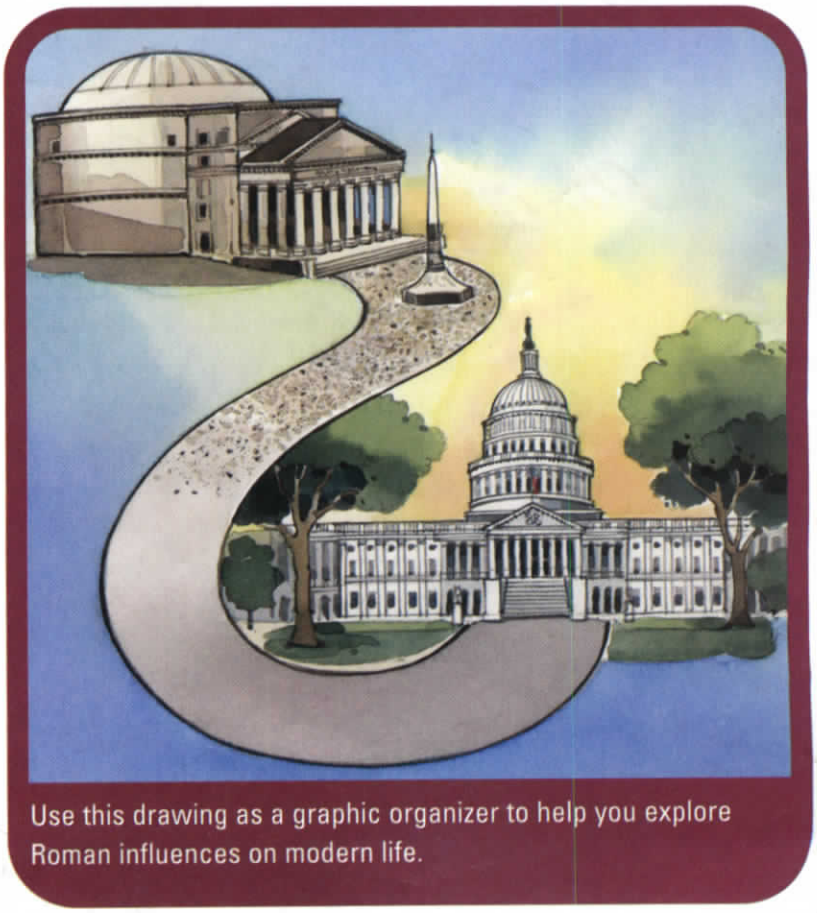
"All roads lead to Rome" boasted the ancient Romans. For 500 years, from about 27 B.C.E. to 476 C.E., the city of Rome was the capital of the greatest empire the world had ever seen. Road markers for thousands of miles showed the distance to Rome. But more than roads connected the empire's 50 million people. They were also connected by Roman law, Roman customs, and Roman military might.

At its height, around 117 C.E., the **Roman Empire** spanned the whole of the Mediterranean world, from northern Africa to the Scottish border, from Spain to Syria. During this time, the Roman world was generally peaceful and prosperous. There was one official language and one code of law. Roman soldiers guarded the frontiers and kept order within the empire's boundaries. Proud Romans believed that the empire would last forever.

But the empire did not last. By the year 500, the western half of this great empire had collapsed. For historians, the fall of Rome marks the end of the ancient world and the beginning of the Middle Ages.

As one historian has written, "Rome perished, yet it lived on." The medieval world would pass on many aspects of Roman culture that still affect us today.

In this chapter, you will discover how and why the Roman Empire fell. Then you will learn how Rome's influence lives on in **art, architecture** and **engineering, language** and **writing,** and **philosophy, law,** and **citizenship**.



Use this drawing as a graphic organizer to help you explore Roman influences on modern life.

In 410 C.E., a Germanic tribe attacked Rome, the capital of the western part of the Roman Empire.

1.2 The End of the Roman Empire in the West

Rome's first emperor, Caesar Augustus, ended 100 years of civil war and expanded the boundaries of the empire. When he died in 14 C.E., few Romans could imagine that the empire would ever end. Yet by the year 500, the western half of the empire had collapsed. What caused the fall of the mighty Roman Empire?

Problems in the Late Empire

There was no single reason for the end of the Roman Empire. Instead, historians point to a number of problems that combined to bring about its fall.

Political instability. Rome never solved the problem of how to peacefully transfer political power to a new leader. When an emperor died, ambitious rivals with independent armies often fought each other for the emperor's crown.

Even when the transfer of power happened without fighting, there was no good system for choosing the next emperor. Often the Praetorian Guard, the emperor's private army, chose the new ruler. But they frequently chose leaders who would reward them rather than those who were best prepared to be emperor.

Economic and social problems. Besides political instability, the empire suffered from economic and social problems. To finance Rome's huge armies, its citizens had to pay heavy taxes. These taxes hurt the economy and drove many people into poverty. Trade also suffered.

For many people, unemployment was a serious problem. Wealthy families used slaves and cheap labor to work their large estates. Small farmers could not compete with the large landowners. They fled to the cities looking for work, but there were not enough jobs for everyone.

Other social problems plagued the empire, including growing corruption and a decline in the spirit of citizenship. Notorious emperors like Nero and Caligula wasted large amounts of money. A rise in crime made the empire's cities and roads unsafe.

Weakening frontiers. A final problem was the weakening of the empire's frontiers. The huge size of the empire made it hard to defend. It sometimes took weeks for leaders in Rome to communicate with generals. By the 300s C.E., Germanic tribes were pressing hard on the

western borders of the empire. Many of these people settled inside the empire and were recruited into the army. But these soldiers had little loyalty to Rome.

The Fall of Rome In 330 C.E., the emperor Constantine took a step that changed the future of Rome. He moved his capital 850 miles to the east, to the ancient city of Byzantium. He renamed the city New Rome. Later it was called Constantinople. (Today it is known as Istanbul, Turkey.)

After Constantine's reign, power over the vast empire was usually divided between two emperors, one based in Rome and one in Constantinople. Rome became the capital of just the western part of the empire.

The emperors in Rome soon found themselves threatened by invading Germanic tribes. In 410 C.E., one of these tribes attacked and looted Rome itself. Finally, in 476, the last emperor in the west was driven from his throne. The western half of the empire began to dissolve into separate kingdoms ruled by different tribes.

In the east, the empire continued for another 1,000 years. Today we call this eastern empire the Byzantine Empire, after Byzantium, the original name of its capital city. You will learn more about the Byzantine Empire in Chapter 6.

In western Europe, Rome's fall did not mean the end of Roman civilization. The influence of Rome lived on through the medieval period and all the way to our time. As you read about the legacy of the Romans, think about how ideas and events from the distant past still affect us today.

The Roman Empire at Its Height, About 117 C.E.

mural a painting on a wall
mosaic a picture made up of small pieces of tile, glass, or colored stone
fresco a picture painted on the moist plaster of a wall or ceiling

1.3 The Legacy of Roman Art

The Romans adopted many aspects of other cultures and blended them into their own culture. This was true of Roman art. The Romans were especially influenced by the art of the Greeks. In fact, historians often speak of "Greco-Roman" art. Rome played a vital role in passing on this tradition, which has had a major influence on western art.

The Romans added their own talents and tastes to what they learned from other cultures. For example, they imitated Greek sculpture, but Roman sculptors were particularly good at making lifelike busts and statues.

Romans were also great patrons (sponsors) of art. Wealthy families decorated their homes with statues and colorful **murals** and **mosaics**. Roman artists were especially skilled in painting **frescoes,** scenes painted on the moist plaster of walls or ceilings with water-based paints. Roman frescoes often showed three-dimensional landscapes. Looking at one of these frescoes was almost like looking through the wall at a view outside. You've probably seen similar murals in restaurants, banks, and other buildings.

American artists have often adopted a Roman style to add nobility to sculptures and paintings of heroes. Shown here is a Roman statue of the emperor Augustus and an American statue of George Washington. In what ways are they alike?

Mosaics, such as this one from Pompeii, decorated the walls of wealthy Roman homes. They often showed scenes of Roman life.

The Romans also brought a sense of style and luxury to everyday objects. For example, they made highly decorative bottles of blown glass. A bottle for wine might be made in the shape of a cluster of grapes. They also developed the arts of gem cutting and metalworking. One popular art form was the cameo. A cameo is a carved decoration showing a portrait or a scene. The Romans wore cameos as jewelry and used them to decorate vases and other objects. You can find examples of all these art forms today.

A thousand years after the fall of the empire, Roman art was rediscovered during the period called the Renaissance. You will learn about this time in Unit 7. Great artists like Michelangelo revived the Greco-Roman style in their paintings and sculptures.

A good example is the famous ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Painted by Michelangelo in the 1500s, the ceiling shows scenes from the Bible. A Roman would feel right at home looking up at this amazing creation. Tourists still flock to Rome to see it.

Roman art has continued to influence painters and sculptors. Roman styles were especially popular during the early days of the United States. Americans imitated these styles to give their art dignity and nobility. Today you can see a number of statues in Washington, D.C., that reflect a strong Roman influence.

1.4 The Legacy of Roman Architecture and Engineering

The Romans were skilled and clever builders. In their architecture and engineering, they borrowed ideas from the Greeks and other peoples. But the Romans improved on these ideas in ways that future engineers and architects would imitate.

vault an arched structure used to hold up a ceiling or a roof
dome a roof shaped like a half-circle or hemisphere
cathedral a large and important church

Architecture The Romans learned how to use the arch, the vault, and the dome to build huge structures. A **vault** is an arch used for a ceiling or to support a ceiling or roof. A **dome** is a vault in the shape of a half-circle that rests on a circular wall.

Roman baths and other public buildings often had great arched vaults. The Pantheon, a magnificent temple that still stands in Rome, is famous for its huge dome. The Romans used concrete to help them build much bigger arches than anyone had attempted before. Concrete is made by mixing broken stone with sand, cement, and water and allowing the mixture to harden. The Romans did not invent the material, but they were the first to make widespread use of it.

The Romans also invented a new kind of stadium. These large, open-air structures seated thousands of spectators. The Romans used concrete to build tunnels into the famous stadium in Rome, the Colosseum. The tunnels made it easy for spectators to reach their seats. Modern football stadiums still use this feature.

The Pantheon still stands in Rome as an immense tribute to the legacies of Roman architecture.

The grand style of Roman buildings has inspired many architects through the centuries. Medieval architects, for example, frequently imitated Roman designs, especially in building great churches and **cathedrals**. You can also see a Roman influence in the design of many modern churches, banks, and government buildings. A fine example is the Capitol building, the home of the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C.

Another Roman innovation that has been widely copied is the triumphal arch. This is a huge monument built to celebrate great victories or achievements. A famous example is the Arc de Triomphe (Arch of Triumph) in Paris, France. This monument

The ruins of the Roman Colosseum, where gladiators fought for the entertainment of spectators, still stand in Rome today.

celebrates the victories of the French emperor Napoleon in the early 1800s. Today it is the national war memorial of France.

Engineering The Romans changed engineering as well as architecture. They were the greatest builders of roads, bridges, and **aqueducts** in the ancient world.

aqueduct a pipe or channel built to carry water between distant places

More than 50,000 miles of road connected Rome with the frontiers of the empire. The Romans built their roads with layers of stone, sand, and gravel. Their techniques set the standard of road building for 2,000 years. Cars in some parts of Europe still drive on freeways built over old Roman roads.

The Romans also set a new standard for building aqueducts. They created a system of aqueducts for Rome that brought water from about 60 miles away to the homes of the city's wealthiest citizens, as well as to its public baths and fountains. The Romans built aqueducts in other parts of the empire as well. The water system in Segovia, Spain, still uses part of an ancient Roman aqueduct. Roman arches from aqueducts can still be found in Europe, North Africa, and western Asia.

What features of Roman architecture can you spot in the U.S. Capitol building?

Romans wrote in all capital letters, as seen on this Roman distance marker from 217 C.E.

1.5 The Legacy of Roman Language and Writing

An especially important legacy of Rome for people in medieval times was the Romans' language, Latin. After the fall of the empire, Latin continued to be used by scholars and the Roman Catholic Church. Church **scribes** used Latin to record important documents. Educated European nobles learned Latin so they could communicate with their peers in other countries.

Latin remains extremely influential today. Several modern European languages developed from Latin, including Italian, Spanish, and French. English is a Germanic language, but it was strongly influenced by the French-speaking Normans, who conquered England in 1066 C.E. English has borrowed heavily from Latin, both directly and by way of French. In fact, we still use the Latin alphabet, although Latin has 23 letters and English has 26.

You can see the influence of Latin on many of the words we use today. For example, our calendar comes from the one adopted by the Roman ruler Julius Caesar. The names of several months come from Latin. *August* honors Caesar Augustus. *September* comes from Latin words meaning "the seventh month." (The Roman new year started in March, so September was the seventh month.) *October* means "the eighth month." Can you guess the meanings of *November* and *December*?

scribe a person trained to write or copy documents by hand

Many English words start with Latin prefixes. A prefix is a combination of letters at the beginning of a word that carries its own meaning. Attaching a prefix to a root word creates a new word with a new meaning. In fact, the word *prefix* was formed this way. It comes from *pre* ("in front of") and *fix* ("fasten" or "attach"). The chart below on the right shows other examples.

As you can see from the chart below on the left, other English words come from Latin root words. For instance, *manual* and *manipulate* are derived from the Latin word *manus,* meaning "hand."

Even Latin **proverbs** are still in use. For example, look at the reverse side of a U.S. penny. There you'll see the U.S. motto *E pluribus unum* ("Out of many, one").

proverb a popular saying that is meant to express something wise or true

Finally, we still use Roman numerals. The Romans used a system of letters to write numbers. The Roman numerals I, V, X, L, C, D, and M represent 1, 5, 10, 50, 100, 500, and 1,000 in the Roman number system. You may have seen Roman numerals used on clocks, sundials, and the first pages of books. You might also spot Roman numerals on buildings and in some movie credits to show the year in which they were made.

Latin Roots Used in English Words

Latin Root	Meaning	English Word
anima	life, breath, soul	animal
civis	citizen, community	civic
lex, legalis	law, legal	legislature
manus	hand	manual
militare	to serve as a soldier	military
portare	to carry	portable
unus	one	united
urbs	city	suburb
verbum	word	verbal

Latin Prefixes Used in English Words

Latin Prefix	Meaning	English Word(s)
in, im, il	not	inactive, impossible, illogical
inter	among, between	international
com, co	together, with	communicate, cooperate
pre	before	precede
post	after, behind	postpone
re	back, again	remember
semi	half	semicircle
sub	under, less than, inferior to	submarine
trans	across, through	transportation

1.6 The Legacy of Roman Philosophy, Law, and Citizenship

philosophy the study of wisdom, knowledge, and the nature of reality

Roman **philosophy,** law, and ideas about citizenship were greatly influenced by the Greeks. But the Romans made contributions of their own that they passed on to future generations.

A Philosophy Called Stoicism A Greek school of thought that became especially popular in Rome was Stoicism. Many upper-class Romans adopted this philosophy and made it their own.

Stoics believed that a divine (godly) intelligence ruled all of nature. A person's soul was a spark of that divine intelligence. "Living rightly" meant living in a way that agreed with nature.

To the Stoics, the one truly good thing in life was to have a good character. This meant having virtues such as self-control and courage. Stoics prized duty and the welfare of the community over their personal comfort. Roman Stoics were famous for bearing pain and suffering bravely and quietly. To this day, we call someone who behaves this way "stoic."

The emperor Marcus Aurelius was a devoted Stoic. He wrote about his philosophy of life in a book called *Meditations*. Many people are still inspired by the ideas in this book.

Law and Justice Roman law covered marriages, inheritances, contracts (agreements) between people, and countless other parts of daily life. Modern legal codes in European countries like France and Italy are based in part on ancient Roman laws.

Another legacy of the Romans was the Roman idea of justice. The Romans believed that there was a universal law of justice that came from nature. By this natural law, every person had rights. Judges in Roman courts tried to make just, or fair, decisions that respected people's rights.

Like people everywhere, the Romans did not always live up to their ideals. Their courts did not treat the poor or slaves as equal to the rich. Emperors often made laws simply because they had the power to do so. But the ideals of Roman law and justice live on. For example, the ideas of natural law and natural rights are echoed in the Declaration of Independence. Modern-day judges, like judges in Roman courts, often

U.S. citizens enjoy the right to vote thanks to the ideas of citizenship that began in Roman times.

make decisions based on ideals of justice as well as on written law. Similarly, many people around the world believe that all humans have basic rights that no written law can take away.

Citizenship When Rome first began expanding its power in Italy, to be a "Roman" was to be a citizen of the city-state of Rome. Over time, however, Rome's leaders gradually extended citizenship to all free people in the empire. Even someone born in Syria or Gaul (modern-day France) could claim to be a Roman. All citizens were subject to Roman law, enjoyed the same rights, and owed allegiance (loyalty) to the emperor.

The idea of citizenship as both a privilege and a responsibility has descended from Roman times to our own. While most people in the United States are citizens by birth, many immigrants become citizens by solemnly promising loyalty to the United States. Regardless of where they were born, all citizens have the same responsibilities. For example, they must obey the law. And all enjoy the same basic rights spelled out in the Constitution and its amendments, including the Bill of Rights.

1.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you explored the rich legacy of ancient Rome. The Roman Empire fell more than 1,500 years ago, but it left a lasting mark on western civilization. We can see Rome's influence today in our art, architecture and engineering, language and writing, philosophy, law, and ideas about citizenship. In the next chapter, we'll look at the society that developed in western Europe in the centuries after Rome's fall.